

April 8, 2019

Honourable Lisa Thompson
Minister of Education
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Thompson:

On behalf of the Durham District School Board, I am writing to share our concerns regarding recent announcements by the Ministry of Education that we believe will have significant negative impact on our students.

Our board is a mix of suburban and rural areas. As trustees, we are responsible to our communities for the quality of education provided in local schools within an approved financial framework. With this in mind, we believe the proposed changes will hinder our ability to continue to provide the high-quality education Durham students deserve.

As trustees, we are deeply concerned about the implications of the proposed changes. These changes will significantly and negatively impact students and staff.

Staffing Reductions

As funding decreases and class sizes increase, board staff will need to adhere to the local collective agreements which specify more stringent limits on class size. These changes, especially at the secondary level, will have immediate and long term implications on our students and the programs we are able to offer them in our schools. The reduction of staff, even through attrition, will result in fewer options for students, resulting in a negative impact on student achievement and well-being.

Staffing Cuts, Attrition and Limiting Course Options for Students

When the government does not replace retired teachers, and uses attrition to reduce staff complement, course options for our students diminish drastically, especially in the areas of the arts, trades and specialty subjects. Our smaller, rural and inner-city schools are significantly impacted (eg. the physics or math teacher retires and you cannot replace them). With limited course options, such as the trades, this puts students with special needs who often take these courses at risk of not obtaining enough credits for graduation.



This does not provide equitable education programs across our schools, limits program options and does not prepare our students for post-secondary pathways when they do not have access to course options.

Mandatory eLearning

The Durham District School Board has developed an exceptional eLearning platform, and we have come to learn, however, that there is a significant difference between voluntary participation and mandatory participation in eLearning courses. The eLearning environment is not appropriate for all students. Our Board has a large geographical region where not all students can access the internet. Students living in poverty do not have the financial means to access the internet, therefore creating inequities for our vulnerable students. We are concerned that mandatory participation will have the unintended consequence of students stressed with the demands of self-directed learning, and some may struggle with special requirements that will prohibit them from being able to complete the courses and even ability to graduate. In some areas of our school board, students are unable to access reliable broadband service and/or transportation to an accessible location. Students need face to face learning opportunities with their teachers to receive feedback and support regarding their learning. Teachers also support student well-being, and teacher-student interactions are necessary for students with anxiety, and for students who require a caring teacher who is invested in their success.

The mandatory eLearning proposal will reduce staffing as the overall full time equivalent (FTE) will be reduced by having four courses taught at a Provincial consortium level not by local DDSB teachers. Reduction in staffing reduces the overall budget, therefore the infrastructure of our Board in terms of funding, operational requirements, staffing and potentially capital funding are all impacted.

Ontario Autism Program (OAP)

The new OAP does not adequately meet the needs of students identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Our schools are not equipped to provide the level of service required for students with these complex needs and requirements. Teachers and administrators are not equipped to meet the needs of our students with ASD. These returning students have significant needs and challenges that require supports and programming beyond traditional classrooms. These are our most vulnerable students who require specialized programming and supports. A model providing a multi-disciplinary team and established support centres in schools was submitted to the Ministry for review as an alternative. Our students require specialized therapy and treatment programs. One day of training for staff is not appropriate to meet the needs of both students with ASD and complex needs.

We have attached our original letter outlining our concerns regarding the OAP funding model.

Reduction of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs)

The reduction of staffing for ECEs from 1.14 to 1.0 FTE significantly reduces our ECE complement. ECEs support our early learners in receiving the best start to their educational journey.

Our violent incident data suggests that a large number of incidents occur during early years and primary grades as students learn developmental skills and self-regulation. Our ECEs play a critical role in helping our early learners acquire developmental milestones and reduce aggression in our classrooms.



They also support our students on buses who need additional support.

Mandatory Math Testing

Mandatory math testing of teachers does not address the true needs of the math program. A modern redesign of the math curriculum is required for Ontario students. Providing math courses and professional training and development both in pre-teaching qualification programs and ongoing math professional development for teachers who currently teach math are more effective ways to address professional learning and upgrading. Not **all** teachers teach math. Secondary teachers are required to have this qualification as a teachable subject and are specialists in this area. There is no correlation to a math test and improved math outcomes for students. Ongoing professional learning and a focus on math instructional strategies and pedagogical practice would support and enhance math instruction.

Changes to Curriculum

The proposed changes to the Health and Physical Education curriculum are still a concern to us. The revisions must reflect the current reality and needs of our students in order to educate them in a challenging and complex world.

Local Priorities Fund

If the local priorities fund is not extended past the expiry date of August 31, 2019, our Board will experience the loss of many staff who support students with special needs including staff who provide direct support which enables our students to be able to attend school. The elimination of the local priorities fund will significantly decrease levels of service to our students with special needs.

Educational Development Charges (EDCs)

The DDSB continues to experience areas of exceptional growth which generate the need to acquire school sites. At present, the EDC deficit is \$12.9 million and the contemplated future charge per permit of \$11,876.00 is a massive increase. This amount will significantly impact affordable home ownership in the Durham Region. The delay in addressing this funding shortfall perpetuates an EDC deficit.

Concluding Concerns

It is important to note that not only will these proposed changes have a profound impact on our students and staff, but they will prevent the Board of Trustees from delivering on our commitments and outcomes laid out in the board's multi-year strategic plan.

As trustees, we know how dedicated our employees are in creating safe, inclusive learning environments to support our most vulnerable students, and students with special needs.

We are committed to providing quality education to our students and community.



The Ministry proposed changes will profoundly reduce levels of service and the quality of education.

We continue to extend our offer to partner and collaborate with the Ministry of Education to develop viable solutions that support students, staff and families.

Sincerely,



Michael Barrett, Chair
Durham District School Board

MB:kc

cc: DDSB Trustees
Lisa Millar, Director of Education
Eva Kyriakides, Chair, SEAC
Chairs, Ontario Public School Boards
Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Cathy Abraham, President, OPSBA
Local MPP's
Local Unions



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